

Notes on the capture of a rare Leathery Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in Johore waters.

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Whilst residing at Johore Bahru in 1905 a specimen of the rare Leathery Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*, L.) was brought to me by Malay fishermen who had found the reptile entangled in their fishing stakes at Kampong Batu Jawa in the Johore Strait on March 11th of that year.

According to their account of its capture, for several days previously, the screens and nets of their *kelong* had been broken and torn by some unknown agency that at length, at day-break of that morning, proved to be an immense turtle of a kind unknown to them which had entangled itself beyond escape in the material of the damaged fish-trap. For a time they were at a loss to know how to dispose of their unwieldy capture, but finally brought out a large lighter which, filling with water, they sank beneath the turtle; then by baling out the water, the latter was soon reposing on the bottom of the dry boat, where unfortunately it shortly expired and was left exposed to the heat of the sun's rays until it reached me at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Getting it ashore was an operation of some difficulty for it was impossible to grip the creature in any way, and it was not until I had collected a gang of ten Chinese coolies furnished with poles and ropes that it was finally lifted from the boat and up the steps of the sea-wall.

The weight of this turtle—a male—I estimated as between nine hundred and one thousand pounds and the principal measurements taken were as follows.

Total length in straight line from tip of head to tip of tail	...	...	...	234 cms. (7 ft. 8 in.)
Extreme breadth of carapace	...	...	...	84 ,, (2 ft. 9 in.)
" " between tips of extended flippers	...	...	...	240 ,, (7 ft. 10 in.)

In colour the upper surface was black, mottled with pinky white, while the lower parts were principally yellowish, scantily blotched with dark brown.

The carapace and plastron presented a mosaic-like appearance; the remaining parts were covered with smooth skin, that of the head being entirely free from shields of any nature as is sometimes reported.

The contents of the stomach consisted mainly of small fishes, prawns and other crustaceans, mixed with a lesser amount of different vegetable substances.

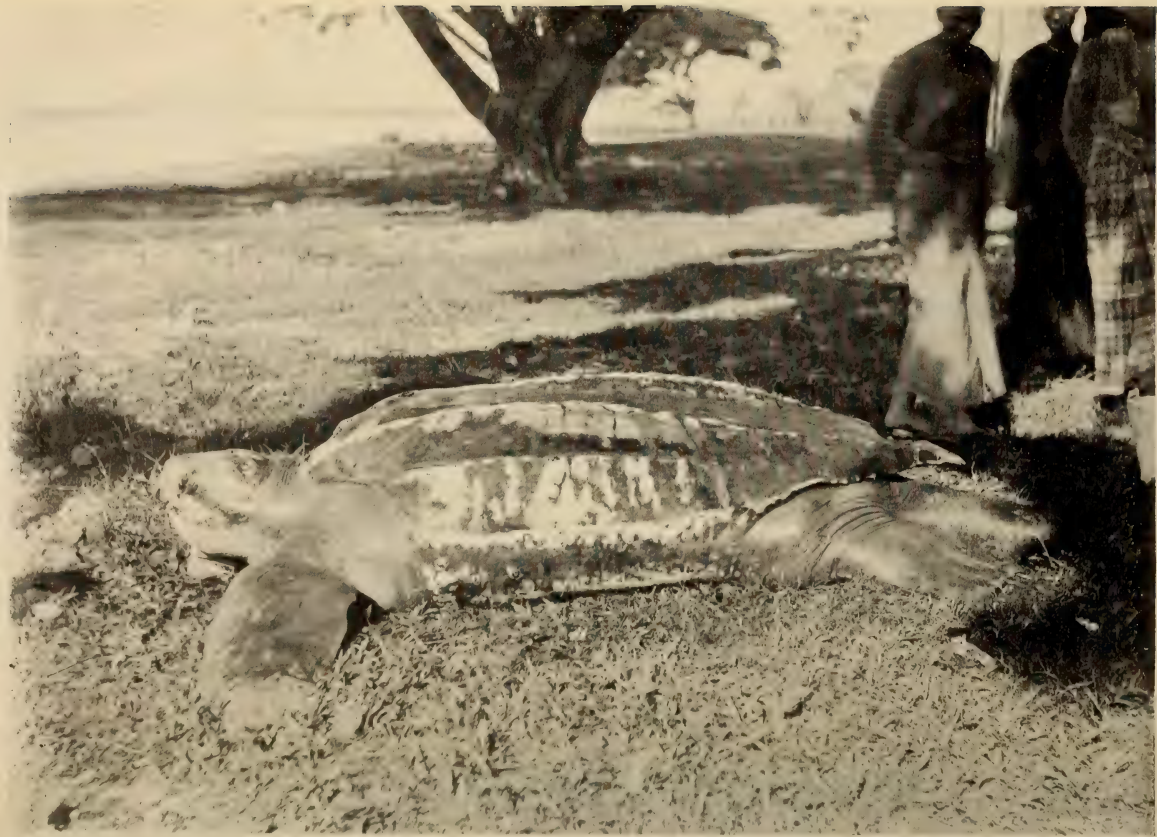
So little is this turtle known locally that it was some time before I could obtain a name for it, but at length the word "kambau" was given me with the additional information that the term also applied to anything slow or sleepy, such as a *prau* in a calm, or light head-wind.

Various circumstances, besides its already somewhat putrid state, prevented me from preserving this valuable specimen in its entirety, but early on the following morning I obtained a number of prisoners from the gaol and with their help got out the skeleton. The flesh, though said to be of a rank and unpleasant flavour, was eagerly begged for by numerous Chinese as soon as stripped from the carcass. The novel appearance and huge size of the reptile were causes of much attraction, and all the afternoon during which it was lying on the sea-front, it was a centre for crowds of interested people.

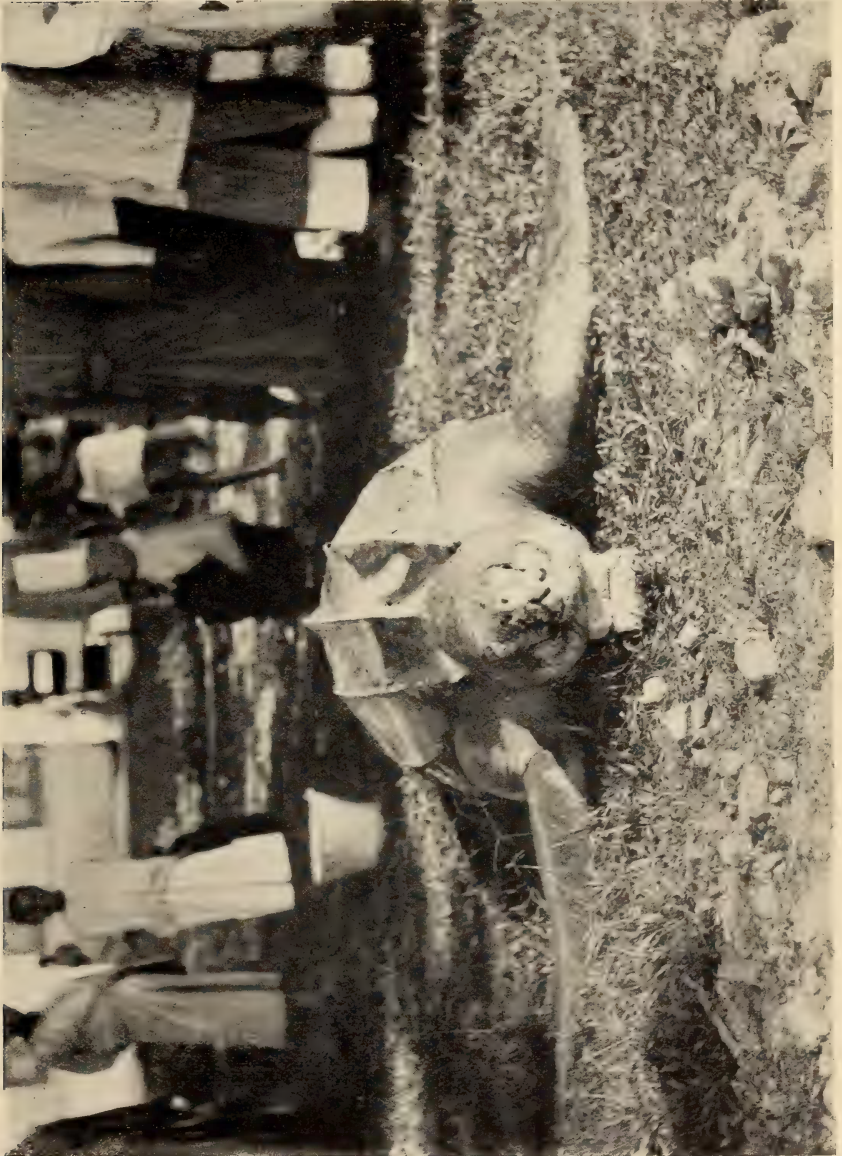
Though the species is widely distributed through tropical seas (and is occasionally noted outside such areas) I know of only one other example captured in our locality, and this—a much smaller specimen—was forwarded to the Raffles Museum, where it is now exhibited, by Mr. A. M. Skinner who obtained it at Tanjong Katong, Singapore, in 1884. The Johore specimen may therefore take rank as the second recorded capture in this part of the Malayan seas.

A full account of the anatomy of the Leathery Turtle, based on the investigation of a small Japanese specimen, appeared in a recent number of the P. Z. S. (1905, Vol. I Pt. II) but my photographs of this locally-obtained individual

are reproduced here as hitherto illustrations of this species have given in general a far from accurate representation of its appearance.



Leathery Turtle (side view).



Leathery Turtle.



Leathery Turtle (Head).